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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, Feb. 22, 1932

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(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "More Saving Ways." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics,
U. S. D. A.

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Two hundred candlesticks on George Washington's birthday cake today. Just two centuries ago, as every school child knows, the father of this country was born at Bridges Creek, Virginia. Because of the bicentennial this year, lots of us are having an unusual opportunity to learn interesting and forgotten facts about this great American, for the historians have been making a special study of old letters, diaries and other documents that give us a picture not only of the man but also of the time in which he lived.

The other day when the Menu Specialist and I were talking over meals for the coming week, I began to wonder about menus back in Washington's time.

"What do you suppose Martha planned for George's breakfast in the old days at Mount Vernon?" I asked the Menu Specialist.

We got some books and looked it up. According to the old letters and journals of the time breakfast was generally served at seven in the morning.

The Reverend Andrew Burnaby, writing about customs in America in 1759, had this to say about breakfast:

"The ancient custom of eating meat for breakfast still continues. At the top of the table where the lady of the house presides, there is constantly tea and coffee, but the rest of the table is garnished out with roast fowls, ham and venison, game and other dainties. There is scarcely a Virginia lady who breakfasts without ham!"

Washington was said to have an excellent appetite. No wonder those big Virginia breakfasts appealed to him, for he was an early riser and was busy hours before time to eat. Once when a friend asked how he accomplished so much work, he replied: "I rise at four o'clock and a great deal of my work is done while others sleep."

Beside the frequent mention of ham as a popular food, the old papers have a great deal to say about dishes made from corn meal, particularly corn bread. The corn meal which the settlers learned to use from the Indians became a stable food in almost every home during Colonial times. Many accounts

speak of corn bread of some sort served three times a day. Southern cooks particularly specialized on corn meal delicacies.

The next time you want to serve something different in the breakfast line, why not serve an early American or Colonial breakfast, featuring the foods popular back in those days? Here's a suggestion for a simple menu of that sort: Apple sauce; Broiled Ham; Corn muffins, and a Beverage.

I've left out the quantities of roast fowls, venison, game and other dainties that the Reverend Burnaby spoke of in his letter. We present-day Americans don't have game of all sorts abounding within a stone's throw from our homes as Washington did. We can't go out and pick off a deer or a wild turkey before breakfast. And what's more we aren't the eaters that our ancestors were. With all respect to the good old days and to our worthy forefathers, I think we're far wiser than they in our eating habits. How do I know? Well, I'll let you in on a secret. You'd be surprised how often in those early diaries and letters accounts of meals are followed by the sad but telling comment: "Sudden pains and sickness in the stomach at night."

Saving health is as good a way to economize as saving food. You can do both by planning the right kind of menus for your family.

That reminds me. Isn't this Monday? Time to talk over saving ways again. Let's begin with a few small items that are often wasted in the kitchen.

There's fat, for instance. Fat goes to waste in far too many kitchens. Yet it's a good energy food, useful in so many ways in cooking. And, if you are constantly buying it for cooking purposes, it's a real item on the food bill.

"What do you do with left-over fat in your kitchen?" I asked my Next-Door Neighbor the other day.

She answered by escorting me to her refrigerator, opening the door and pointing to a row of jars on one shelf, all carefully labeled. One was marked "Bacon fat," another "Chicken Fat," another "Fish Frying Fat," and so forth.

"No use throwing out good fat left from cooking," she remarked. "I believe that all fat left from cooking meat can be used later if it is properly rendered and kept cold. Of course, sometimes it needs straining before it goes into the jars. And it pays to keep the different kinds of fat separate, since they will be used for different purposes. Chicken fat, for example, is delicate enough for making cake, whereas the flavor of lamb or bacon fat would make it too strong for that purpose. Bacon fat however, is excellent for frying potatoes, fish, meat and so forth."

"Now this jar," continued My Neighbor, pointing to the one labeled "Fish Frying Fat", "this jar is kept for fat which has been used for cooking fish. I strain the used fat and keep it here in the refrigerator ready to use the next time we have fish."

Our grandmothers, you know, often used the excess fat left from cooking for making soap. But in these days when you can buy fire soap so inex-

pensively, the homemade kind is an economy only when you have a large surplus of fat that can't be used for cooking. However, if you want a good recipe for homemade soap, I have one for you. Write me for directions for making soap and I'll send you some that will produce just as good a product as the kind grandmother made.

But let's go back to My Neighbor's refrigerator. Something else I noticed -- a half grapefruit placed upside down on a plate.

"That's the way I keep the cut surface of grapefruit, orange or lemon fresh and moist," said she. "You know how quickly a half lemon will dry out in the air? But if it's inverted on a plate and the air pressed out beneath the surface, it will stay fresh until it is used. This is my way of saving left-over pieces of any citrus fruit. It's convenient besides. Often I prepare halves of grapefruit or oranges for breakfast the night before, and turn them upside down on plates to keep for breakfast."

Speaking of left-overs," I said, "what do you do about left-over scraps of bread?"

"I use every one of them for breadcrumbs. We're a great family for baked things -- scalloped dishes, souffles and so forth, to say nothing of bread puddings and apple brown betty for dessert. So I always need a supply of crumbs and I make it a point to have them on hand. I dry out all scraps of bread in the oven. Then I roll them to crumbs on a board or I run them through my trusty meat grinder. This jar right here on the shelf is my bread crumb container. I keep it always in a dry place, covered with cheesecloth so the crumbs will stay fresh. If stored crumbs are allowed to become damp they are likely to mold. But this cloth fastened over the jar with a rubber band keeps the dust out yet lets the dry air keep the crumbs dry."

Little ways of saving, these are, but you know the old saying, "Small leaks will sink a ship." Small savings may help keep your ship afloat.

Tomorrow, we'll discuss rearranging the kitchen for ease and convenience.

